

Archidis 2011

Philosophy of appraisal

Ethics and axiology

Dr Jenny Bunn, UCL

Margaret Procter, University of Liverpool



Ethics and axiology

- Appraisal is decision making
- Ethics is the philosophical approach to making the right decision
- Appraisal is a value judgement
- Axiology is the philosophy of value



Ethics - general

- Involves defining, evaluating and understanding concepts of right and wrong behaviour
- various frameworks for discussing ethics
- **Teleological:** approach centring on 'outcome' (greatest happiness to greatest number)
- **Deontological:** every action has its own absolute and intrinsic moral value (lying is ALWAYS wrong)
- centring on 'fairness' (equal rights)



Ethical dilemmas

- We may face an **ethical dilemma**: where resolution may not seem ‘fair’; where upholding one set of rights cancels out another set; where the ‘greatest happiness to the greatest number’ results in less happiness for a minority ...
- “Some of the greatest ethical problems in modern life arise from conflicts between personal codes based on moral teachings, professional practices, regulations based on employment status, institutional policies and state and federal laws.”

SAA preamble to 1992 Code of Ethics



Some dilemmas

1. My grandmother told my mother to lie to me about the fact that she (my grandmother) had cancer.
 - Deontological conclusion: Because this involved a lie (always a wrong action) my mother behaved unethically in telling me that my grandmother was not ill.
 - Teleologically – look at the outcome
2. Archivists knowingly destroy 200 years' worth of unique birth, marriage and death registers.
 - is this unethical?



(Dis)advantages

Deontological

- Easier to apply
- Simple questions: what actions are inherently good
- Does the solution avoid lying, stealing, deceit ...
- Lack of flexibility

Teleological

- Flexible, pragmatic, common sense
- Actions producing more benefits than harm are the right ones
- But can one always foresee all *consequences*?



Ethics and you - as information professionals

Embedded in ISO15489 :

- statute and case law & regulations
- mandatory standards of best practice
- voluntary codes of best practice
- voluntary codes of conduct and ethics
- identifiable expectations of the community about what is **acceptable behaviour** for the specific sector or organization

application of ethics to information management

- ✓ what does it look like?
- ✓ what is there to help you make ethical decisions?



Making (ethical) decisions

1. Recognise an ethical issue i.e. is there a dilemma?
 2. Get the facts
 3. Evaluate alternative options – this involves an assessment of the consequences
 4. Decide which is the most ethical
 5. Make a decision and test it (Would you be happy to see the results of your decision on the front page of *The Guardian/Die Welt/Le Monde*?)
 6. Act: state the ethical justification
- Does this look like a possible approach to appraisal?



Professional ethics

- Specialist knowledge (medical, legal, information) confers power
- Professional codes of ethics developed to deal with the consequences of misuse of power
- “The expertise of information professionals entails an inherent measure of power. This power is rooted in the professional’s ability to almost instantly locate, access, and retrieve information using resources located, quite literally, at his or her fingertips. Information professionals, as well as those who rely upon them to provide a wide array of information, must recognize and understand the responsibilities associated with this power.”
- [University of Pittsburgh- Institute for Information Ethics and Policy](#)
- Professional associations have responded to these dilemmas, but often with codes of conduct, or codes of practice rather than guidance in matters of ‘right and wrong’ within a moral framework



Codes

■ Codes of practice

- *What you do*

■ Codes of professional conduct

- *How you do it*

■ Codes of ethics

- *What underlies your actions & behaviour (?)*

- ... process driven – input and output - ‘How to ... deal with FoI requests’ – anyone can follow these instructions

- .. by adhering to these rules or guidance you mark yourself out as a professional – someone who can make appropriate decisions in new situations; goes beyond routine practice

[ARMA Code of Professional Responsibility](#)

- ... principles – questions of ‘right and ‘wrong’ in a moral sense.

[UK - CILIP Ethical Principles](#)



Ethical Issues of the Information Age' (Richard Mason, 1986)

- **Privacy**
- **Accuracy**
- **Property**
- **Accessibility**



' Ethical Issues of the Information Age' (Richard Mason, 1986)

- **Privacy:** What information about one's self or one's associations must a person reveal to others, under what conditions & with what safeguards? What things can people keep to themselves and not be forced to reveal to others?
- **Accuracy:** Who is responsible for the authenticity, fidelity & accuracy of information? Similarly, who is to be held accountable for errors in information and how is the injured party to be made whole?
- **Property:** Who owns information? What are the just & fair prices for its exchange? Who owns the channels, especially the airways, through which information is transmitted? How should access to this scarce resource be allocated?
- **Accessibility:** What information does a person/organization have a right or a privilege to obtain, under what conditions and with what safeguards?



ARMA code of ethics

“An information management program must act first in accord with the law. Otherwise there is no proper foundation for decisions made about the creation, use, storage, or disposition of recorded information”

Going to the papers ?

“Because of their responsibilities to their employers or clients as well as to their profession, information and records managers [must] **recognize illegal or unethical situations** and inform the client or employer of possible adverse implications. “



Appraisal is a value judgement

Records



Archives

“Those records of any public or private institution which are adjudged worthy of permanent preservation for reference and research purposes and which have been deposited or have been selected for deposit in an archival institution.”

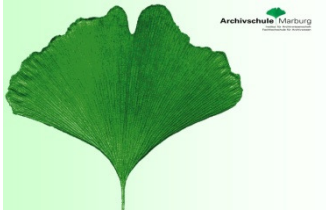
‘records which are recognised as having long-term significance’

‘preserved because of their continuing value’



How do I value thee? Let me count the ways

- Schellenberg's taxonomy of values, e.g. primary/secondary, informational/evidential etc.
- SAA Glossary – 25 terms containing 'value'



Intrinsic Value

Intrinsic value is the archival term that is applied to permanently valuable records that have qualities and characteristics that make the records in their original physical form the only archivally acceptable form for preservation. Although all records in their original physical form have qualities and characteristics that would not be preserved in copies, records with intrinsic value have them to such a significant degree that the originals must be saved.

<http://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/archives-resources/archival-material-intrinsic-value.html>



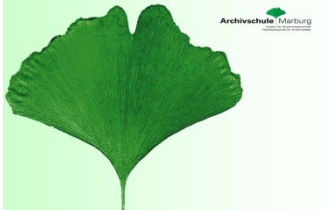
Qualities and Characteristics - Intrinsic Value

- Physical form that may be the subject for study if the records provide meaningful documentation or significant examples of the form
- Aesthetic or artistic quality
- Unique or curious physical features
- Age that provides a quality of uniqueness
- Value for use in exhibits



Qualities and Characteristics - Intrinsic Value

- Questionable authenticity, date, author, or other characteristic that is significant and ascertainable by physical examination
- General and substantial public interest because of direct association with famous or historically significant people, places, things, issues, or events
- Significance as documentation of the formulation of policy at the highest executive levels when the policy has significance and broad effect throughout or beyond the agency or institution
- Significance as documentation of the establishment or continuing legal basis of an agency or institution

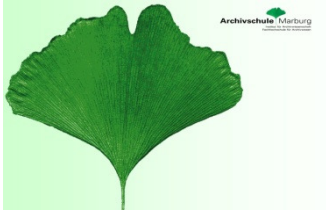


What goes around comes around

2010 NARA Report on Web 2.0 Use and Record Value

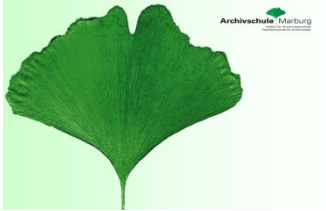
www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/resources/web2.0-use.pdf

In Fiscal Year 2010, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) undertook a study to observe how agencies are using web 2.0 tools to conduct business and identify characteristics that may affect the value of information created and shared in web 2.0 formats. A NARA team interviewed six Federal agencies that are using web 2.0 tools to conduct mission-related business and have policies or procedures for implementing and using tools.



Record value

- *Business value*: The record's role in the business process and its usefulness to the agency's mission, tasks, and compliance with statutory and other requirements.
- *Evidential value*: The characteristics of a record that provides information about the origins, functions, and activities of its creator. Evidential value relates to the process of creating information rather than the actual informational content.



Record value

- *Informational value*: The long-term usefulness or significance of the record based solely on the information content. We will use this term to indicate value of the web 2.0 content regardless of how the information is presented.
- *Contextual value*: The long-term value of the essential properties of the tool such as functionality, layout, and metadata that adds to the informational content. The record has value that could be lost by changing it or removing some of its properties, such as its appearance and format.